

COLOR CAFE

Deltarune Coloring Book Fanzine



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Scarlet Scarves Zines

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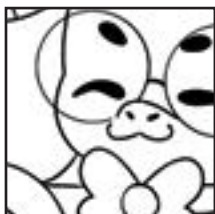
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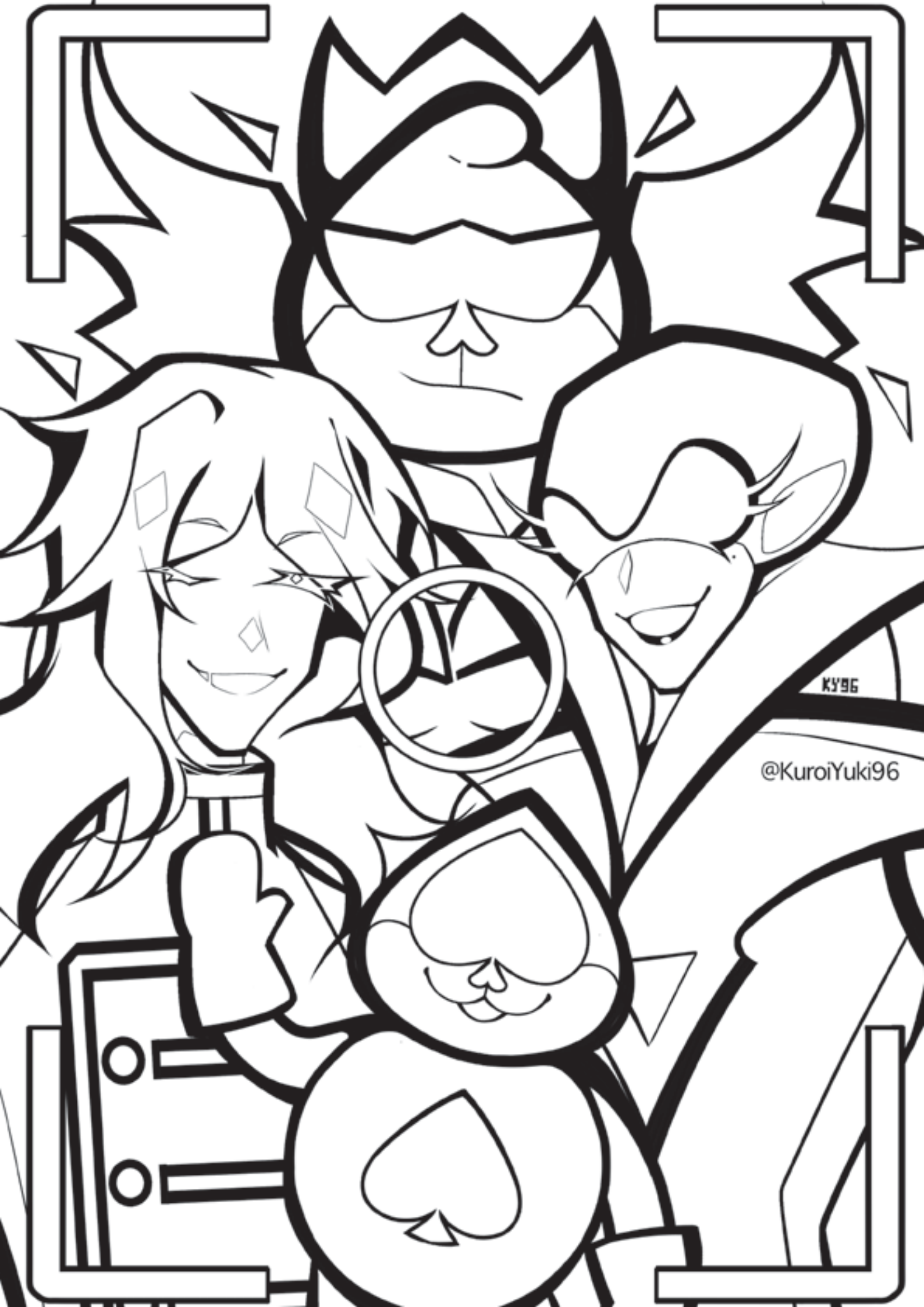






ITEM





KY96

@KuroiYuki96

Content Warnings: Implied Past Character Death

Summary: A snow day? Who has time for that? Not Noelle. Unless...?

There's two feet of snow on the ground when Noelle wakes up. A freak storm, the sort of once-a-century thing that has the adults comparing notes about past storms and arguing about which was worse. The blizzard is ending when Noelle wakes up, and with school canceled, she finds herself sitting in bed and watching the flurries out the window. She thinks about all the odd dreams she's been having lately, about the snow and her friends at school.

"The mayor doesn't get to have a day off," her mom says, and then she gives Noelle a quick hug and is out the door, bundled head to hoof. Noelle sighs to herself and finishes her breakfast. Well, if the mayor doesn't get a day off, then neither does the mayor's daughter. There's reading and studying that Noelle should do. Midterms are coming up.

She's distracted, though, still watching one of the neighbor kids building a snowmonster outside. Then a knock at the door startles her out of her thoughts.

She answers with the politeness expected of the mayor's daughter, but her smile brightens when she sees that it's Susie and Kris. Kris is wearing a parka and a knitted hat, but Susie is just wearing her usual ripped jacket and pants.

"Oh, hi!" Noelle says, opening the door wider.

"Hey, nerd," Susie says with a lopsided smile. Kris just waves. "We were gonna go mess around in the snow and we—I mean, Kris said we should ask if you wanted to come with."

"Oh! Um!" Noelle looks past them briefly, to all the pristine snow and the last of the flakes drifting down out of the clouds. "I... gee, I really want to, but... I'm supposed to—that is, I should probably be staying in to study. We have midterms coming up."

"Psssh, come on!" Susie laughs. "It's a freakin' snow day in autumn, how often does that happen? You can't waste it doing nerd crap!"

"I dunno..."

"Come on, we never get to hang out except when—look, just come out for a bit, then you can go back and be a huge dork!"

Noelle looks past them again. She has always loved the snow. And she can't remember the last time she got to actually play around in it. Not since she was little. Not since...

"Hm... you know what, okay!" Noelle says, grinning.

Susie's smile goes from lopsided and sarcastic to something a little softer, like she's genuinely pleased. Noelle's breath catches in her throat and she hopes she doesn't blush. Kris gives Noelle two thumbs up.

"Just let me get my coat and such. I'll be quick!"

Noelle closes the door, then grabs her coat and hat as fast as she can. A minute later, she's ready. She heads outside again. Susie is leaning back against one of the pillars at the front of the manor and Kris seems to be poking at something in the snow.

"Alright, let's go!" Noelle says, feeling such a strange burst of confidence. She's been feeling that a lot since that odd dream the other day. "Where are we going? We could make snowmonsters... well, maybe not in my yard, I think Mom might get upset, but... maybe in someone else's yard?"

"Snowmonsters are baby mode," Susie says, stuffing her hands in her pockets as they walk. "If it's gonna be anything, it's gotta be snowgoons."

"Snowforts," Kris mumbles.

"Oh hell yeah!"

They head off into town, searching for a good spot. It seems like the entire kid population is out as well, playing in the snow and dodging the plows. Everyone seems to be enjoying themselves, even the parents trying to dig out their cars.

"Greetings, fellow gamers!" comes a familiar voice, and Noelle looks to see Berdly trotting up to them. "I hope you realize that you've made a grave error in entering my territory!"

"Your what now?" Susie says, and Berdly gestures behind him to a large mound of snow in the yard. It's then that Noelle notices that they're in Berdly's neighborhood.

"My defenses might not look like much now, but I'll have you know they're defended by only the best—that being me! So you'd best not approach so boldly!"

"Ohoho," Susie says, slamming a fist into her palm and baring her teeth in a grin. "Okay, I like where this is going!"

Noelle claps her hands together. "Snowball fight?"

"Snowball fight!"

"Noelle, you're on my team," Berdly says, but then his smug grin fades into something kinder. "Or, sorry. You should pick which team you want to be on."

Noelle glances at Susie, feeling her cheeks start to warm. Then she smiles and turns back to Berdly.

"I'll be on your team. It'll be nerds versus...?"

"Punks!"

"Brains versus brawn," Berdly says, stroking his chin. "I like it!"

Berdly's snowfort isn't very impressive, so Noelle goes to work improving it while Kris and Susie start building their own a few yards away. Berdly takes the time to roll up a pile of snowballs. Noelle raises the walls of the snowfort and even adds some crenellations.

The first strike is a sneak attack from Susie. Berdly returns fire with a shout of "dishonorable!" and then the snow is flying. Noelle stays ducking behind the fort wall at first, throwing snowballs without really looking. But this is a snowball fight—this is her element! She can't just hide the whole time.

So she stands up and starts throwing snowballs with deadly aim. She knocks over a portion of the enemy wall. She hits a snowball right out of Susie's hand. She strikes Kris in the shoulder. They're all screaming and laughing. There's snow in Noelle's hair and she feels like a little kid again. Happy and free.

Susie throws a massive snowball and hits Berdly right in the face, leaving him dazed. Now it's just Noelle. She grins with the thrill of it and focuses. Then she starts throwing snowballs even faster, pelting Kris and Susie both. Susie goes bowling over with a hearty laugh as part of their fort collapses. There's a knowing glint in Kris's eye as Noelle throws her last snowball—and hits Kris square in the chest. Kris goes into slow motion, a hero's dramatic end as they flop backward into the snow.

Noelle whoops in triumph. And then she goes to make sure everyone is alright. Cold and snow can hurt if you're not careful, after all.

"I can't believe Noelle's the winner," Susie says with mock-sorrow. Feeling bold, Noelle drops down in the snow next to her. Susie looks over at her, startled and maybe starting to blush.

Noelle laughs. "Never underestimate me!"

"Nah, I wasn't underestimating you," Susie says with a more genuine grin. "I just thought you'd be apologizing every time you hit someone."

"Well... I'm glad I didn't hurt anyone," Noelle admits. "But I dunno. I think I'm just feeling different lately. I think I apologize too much."

They're all lying side by side in the snow at this point, making snow angels, but Noelle can't keep her eyes off of Susie.



"I like the new you," Susie says. "Uh, I mean, it's just that people who apologize and let people walk all over them are annoying. I mean, not that you were ever—ugh! You know what I mean!"

Noelle laughs again. "It's okay! I think I know what you mean."

Berdly sits up. "Hey, we should go warm up somewhere."

There's a pause where Noelle thinks about inviting them to her house, even though her mom would probably get mad. But then Kris speaks up, their voice a low mumble.

"The diner," they say. "Good hot cocoa."

Susie springs to her feet. "Hell yeah, that's a great idea."

They all dust off the snow and make their way to the diner. It's warm inside and not too crowded. Kris gets them a booth in the corner. They sit near the window, peering out the frosted glass, Susie beside them. Noelle and Berdly sit together. Noelle doesn't think the four of them have ever been out like this. When did they all become friends? It feels like it happened so fast. So many things feel like they're happening so fast.

It worried Noelle only a few days ago. Now, she just finds it kind of exciting. She watches them all as they all sip their hot cocoa. Susie is telling an off-color joke. Berdly is making an effort to be more humble, to not monopolize the conversation. Kris is drawing a smiley face in the frost of the window. Noelle smiles to herself. The future is strange and uncertain, and it feels as bright as the sun gleaming off the snow.















THE STRONGEST CARD... IS FRIENDSHIP?! by Darkhymns

Content Warnings: Eating Inanimate Objects

Summary: Susie has a few tricks up her sleeve and she's ready to show them all to Lancer.

In the red forest, the Bad Guys were working on their evil plans.

"Here's one, just repeat after me." Susie cleared her throat, propped her axe on her shoulder, and gave her best snarl. **"Where you been, you slow-ass pack of losers?! Ready to die?!"** She then placed her weapon on the ground, leaning on it. "Okay, now you try."

"Yeah, yeah, okay!" With his tongue perpetually sticking out and a rotund belly one could bounce Hearts Donuts off of (which they had already done to pass the time), her new blue buddy wasn't exactly the most menacing thing she had seen in the Dark World. Then again, most things here weren't anyway.

Lancer bounced on his feet, pointed at Susie, and shouted, **"Hey there! You guys are as slow as a pack of sweet and tangy sugarplums! Get ready to take a comfy nap! And don't forget to drink plenty of milk!"** He finished it off with a twirl. "How was that?"

"...Uh... You didn't repeat what I said at all. You just made everything sound delicious?? But hey, we'll work on it." She lifted her weapon again, grinning like mad. "Let's just spar instead. Ya wanna see my Purple Thrasher?!" This was a step above her Red Buster, because Thrasher sounded way more sick.

"Oh, you know how much I love thrashing!" Grabbing his motorcycle out of thin air, Lancer hopped in and honked his little horn. "Now let's eat!"

"Stop making everything about food!" A powerful purple flash of light rushed out of her weapon, aiming for one of the weird red trees. She was gonna *demolish* it—

"Oh, you dropped something, Susie!! You dropped something!"

"Huh?" Susie missed, her attack skewing far off to the right where the Bake Sale was being held. There was a big crashing sound, followed by terrified screaming, but that wasn't important right now. "You messed me up, Lancer!"

With all the grace of a very bouncy ball, Lancer jumped off his motorcycle, laughing his evil laughter that still wasn't that evil to begin with, though at least he made the 'Ho ho ho' deeper this time. "But Susie!! Look!" He hopped again, making (gross) splort noises towards the dropped item. "Hehe, butt Susie..."

It was just an old deck of playing cards, the kind Susie carried around whenever she was bored or hungry. She hadn't even known she'd brought it to the Dark World. But here it was, packed into a tattered-looking tuck box on the ground that Lancer eagerly picked up.

"Is this pocky? I like pocky! But I can't have any before dinner." He poked at the box opening, giggling. "Can I have one?"

"Those are just some lame cards!" She quickly snatched it from Lancer's hands, already halfway to shoving it back in her pocket. "Don't touch my stuff!"

"O-Oh, I'm sorry." Lancer suddenly deflated. "I guess that wasn't a very Bad Guy thing for me to do..."

That instantly made her feel like trash.

Careful to first put her axe away, Susie took out the deck of cards from its place – looking even rattier than the box they'd been in. Some of the numbers had been scratched off by her claws, with the symbols all cracked and faded. The four of clubs was just a plain old club that looked wrecked, and the six of hearts was nearly broken in half.

"Yo, Lancer," she called out, then proceeded to sit on the leaf-covered ground, leaning her arm on one knee. "Wanna check out some cool tricks I can do?"

At that, Lancer's little sad face flipped; in fact, his whole bouncy body flipped, excited. "Oh, I love tricks! I used to know some guys who did that! I think they're dead." He sat across from her, his legs jittering and crushing the red leaves beneath them.

"Well this trick is gonna knock YOU dead!" she promised. Lancer gasped at the threat to his life, eager for more!

Susie gripped the pack of cards in her hands. She was going to do shuffle tricks. The kind that she saw on TV and looked rad as hell. All she had to do was not mess up. Easy. First, there was the riffle cut. It wasn't as cool as the others, but the simple flipping of the cards in the middle gave that satisfying sound. It also got Lancer watching quietly. She did let a few cards slip free to fall to the ground, but those ones had been loose! "T-That's part of the trick!"

"Oh, okay!" Lancer instantly believed.

Then, she tried one of the butterfly cuts, separating a dozen cards at a time from each other, tilting them around. She tried to do it one-handed, but the balance was difficult, and, uh, *maybe* one or two more cards dropped to the ground. Lancer was still watching, even though she had fewer than 30 cards in her deck right about now.

But who cared about those baby shuffles? It was time for The Ultimate Shuffle. She'd been practicing this one! The waterfall cut was one of the coolest shuffles, and all she had to do was let each card fall from one hand into the other! She *couldn't* mess this up!



"One, two, thre-!" And then the last of her cards flew all around herself, like leaves carried off in the wind. Oh. Oh, she had looked so lame there.

Susie waited for the laughter. She waited to feel stupid for ever trying something like this – but instead she heard... more splorts? (Still gross).. She raised her head, watching as Lancer went to pick up one card in particular. He looked... surprised?

"Uh, Lancer?"

That was when he rushed to her, his smile wide, showing off his incredibly white teeth. The leaves kicked up in the air in his dash. "Hey! Why is there a mini-me in there? Susie! Do you carry pictures of me wherever you go?"

"No?? Why would I?" What was he even talking about??

Then she saw the ace of spades in his hand. It was just a simple, unimportant spade card. Oddly enough, this one wasn't as messed up as the others. She supposed she had always liked the looks of this one for some reason...

Lancer clutched the card in his hand with glee. "Can I keep it? Can I? That's so cool your trick could make a card of me! You're so cool, Susie!"

Susie paused. "...You still think I'm cool?" she asked. Lancer nodded ecstatically.

Her lips tugged into a smile, one that didn't show too many teeth or was the result of manic glee. She patted Lancer's head roughly. The boy sort of squished underneath her strength, but didn't seem to mind. "Sure. Take good care of it, ok?"



Within Ralsei's giant castle, Susie only had eyes for the giant cauldron in the middle. Her hands were placed against the rim, staring down into its depths hungrily. "Susie," Ralsei said with a gentle and only slightly chiding tone. "I told you: I'm not making you any more cakes!"

"Oh, come on! Just one more! I wanna catch it a second time!"

"But Susie!" shouted a familiar voice that made her turn towards the entrance with a smile. "You won't have any room for my famous Lancer cookies, trademark pending!"

Lancer rolled in – literally, with his body on its side to gain maximum speed. He barreled into Susie, who took his impact right in the stomach. The force of the tackle made her hit the cauldron, dangerously tilting it to the side while Ralsei frantically went to right it up again. She gave her blue bestie a noogie, and Lancer tried to do the same, but couldn't due to his incredibly short arms.

"Oh, Susie! Susie!" he yelled. "Look what I got! Can you show me more tricks?"

From a very hidden pocket, Lancer took out the ace of spades card, looking just as new as when she gave it to him – which hadn't been very long ago at all. She grinned, taking out her deck of cards, full except for the special Lancer one. "Got all sorts of tricks up my sleeve!"

"Are you going to play a card game? I know quite a bit myself!" Ralsei clasped his hands together. "Is it blackjack? Crazy eights? Oh, or maybe Go Fish?"

Susie had to pause in her shuffling. "I've never heard of *any* of those games."

"That's so silly!" Lancer said. "There's no fish in these cards!"

Susie ignored Ralsei's nonsense, too busy finally perfecting her waterfall shuffle!

Just as she was lifting up her hand and letting the cards fall, Lancer jumped up frantically with a very loud, "**Wait!!!**"

She flinched – and all the cards fluttered from her hands to drift to the floor. "H-Hey! I was just about to get it!"

"But you're missing the most important card!"

Susie considered. "Is it yours?"

"Nope!" He turned to a politely-waiting Ralsei. "Fluffy boy! Can I have some paper and crayons please?"



"Well, that's very sudden. But I just so happen to always carry some around!" Ralsei bewilderingly produced some sheets of paper and a crayon pack from his robes, happily handing it to an eager Lancer. Immediately, Lancer then began drawing furiously, head bent over the paper as he painstakingly outlined the most minute detail, even going so far as to shade – all with a purple crayon.

"Ta-da! Feast your silky smoothie eyes on this!" Lancer held up what could only be described as a very, very **kick-ass** drawing of Susie. It captured all her favorite features; namely her teeth and her giant muscles. Lancer also employed his stylistic choice of using jagged lines to show how rough and rugged she was. "Every card deck needs a Purple Thrasher, the most powerful card in existence!" With that, he handed it to Susie, along with his ace of spades – which she now realized had a drawn-on grinning face inside the symbol, complete with lolling tongue. "Next to mine, of course!"

"Lancer..." There was only one way she could repay such a kind and genuine act by her friend.

Clutching the two cards he gave her in her right hand, she then reached down to grab the other cards, and proceeded to devour them, tearing them to shreds with her teeth, one by one!!

Ralsei was the first to react. "S-Susie! You're not supposed to eat those!"

But Lancer immediately caught on. "Oh, I get it! This is a new trick, isn't it?"

"That's right!" she said, her mouth full. "With these two cards, I don't need the others anymore! Not unless they survive through all the carnage!"

"Can I play? I wanna play!" Lancer jumped up and down, his spade magic already materializing behind him, aiming for those same cards.

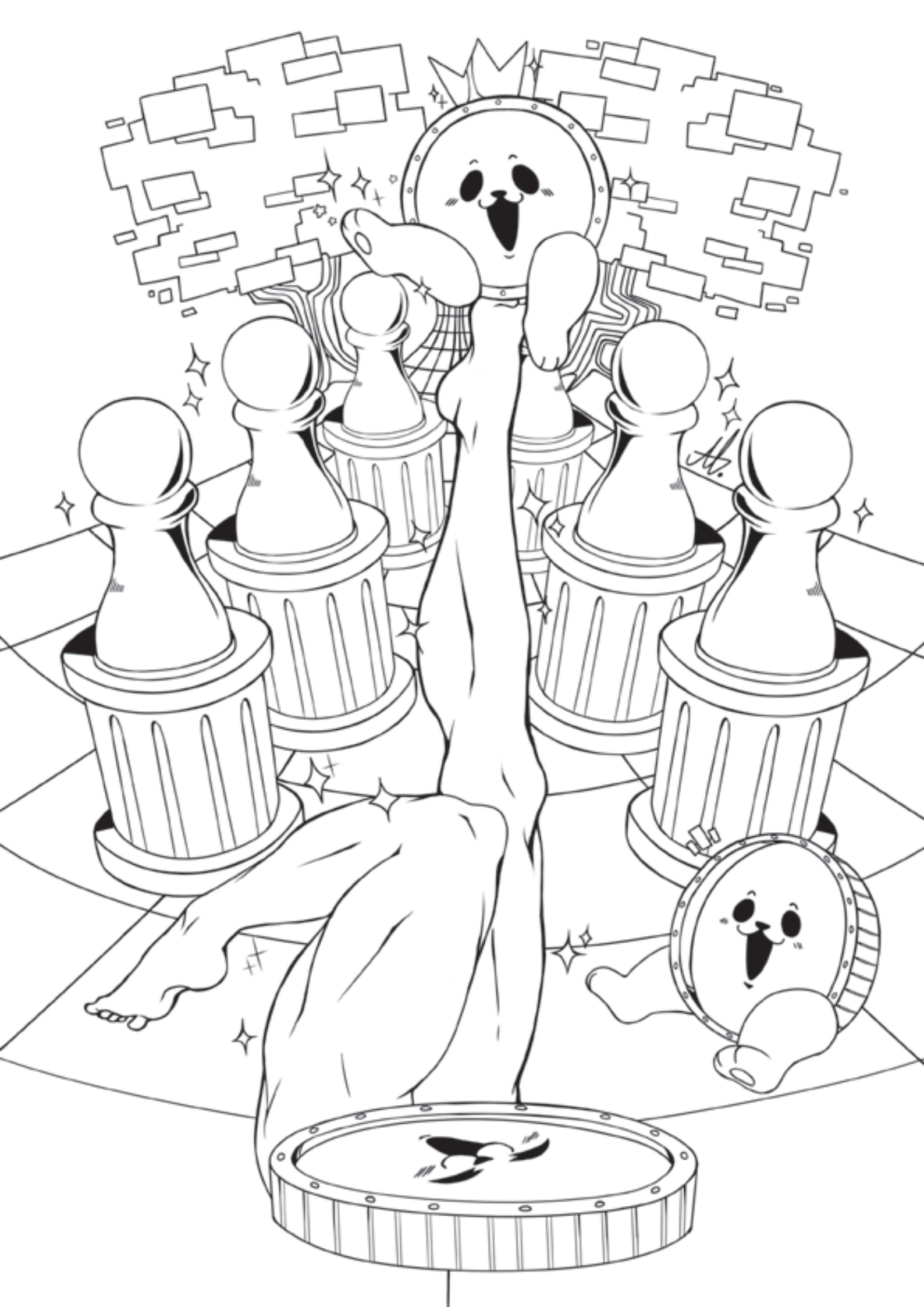
Susie grinned through the shreds of paper still clinging to her teeth, the happiest she ever felt in a long, long time. "**Hell yeah!!**"

RALSEI

PRINCE OF DARKNESS

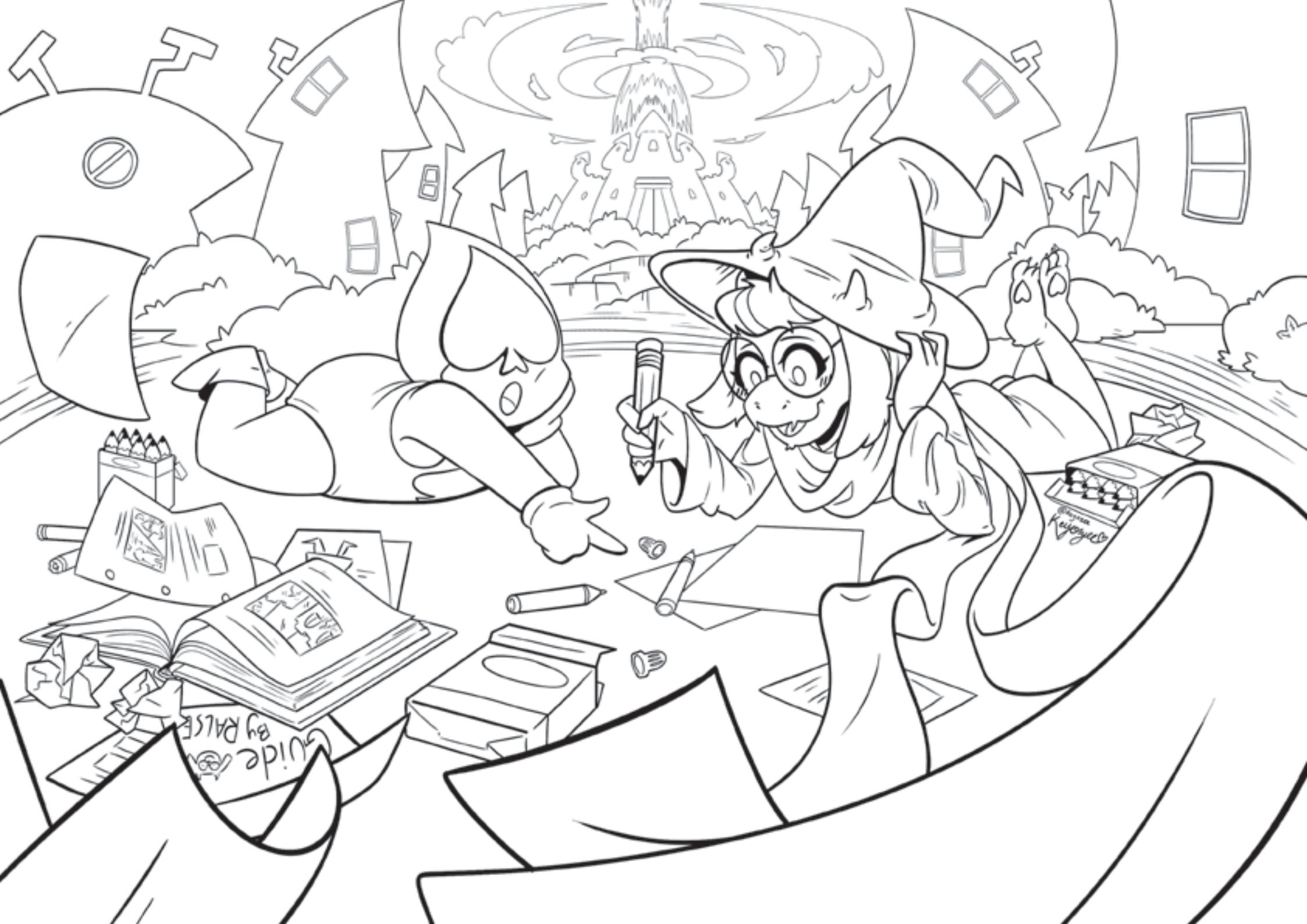


QUEEN AKA Q5U4EX7YY2E9N "HE'S NICE"
PRESENTED BY FUFU









Guide
by RAISE



THE MONSTER UNDERNEATH THE LAKE

by Sese

Content Warnings: None

Summary: Skate wants to feel young again, so she drags her best friend Fuku and the unfortunate waitress, Catti, into her schemes to track down an otherworldly being. An adventure comedy starring the NPCs of Hometown.

The day begins like any other day, with Skateboard Girl (AKA: the coolest gal in town, Skate) and Fuku Fire (AKA: the hottest girl friend around, Fuku) settling into their favorite booth at their local diner. They've been coming here since they were in high school, skipping the first hour of class to enjoy tasty treats together. It's always been fun, which is why they continued the tradition after they graduated.

Skate scoots in so Fuku has space to put her coat down without getting any of Skate's slime on it, then picks up a menu. It's a formality, of course. Their order is always the same.

Her usual staring at the menu routine is interrupted by a loud, drawn out sigh. Skate looks up to see... Catty, but goth. Strange, Skate doesn't remember Catty changing up her image recently.

"Can... I take... your order... ?" the goth Catty asks in a monotone voice.

"Oh! I'll have the regular, how about you, Fuku? The same, yeah?" Skate looks to Fuku, who nods.

Goth Catty gives them a look. "I don't... know what that is. I don't know what you order."

Right, Skate and Fuku usually order with the other waitress. Oops. Skate relays their order (a ludicrous amount of drinks and baked goods), and when the goth Catty is gone Skate scoots in close to Fuku to whisper. "Hey, when did Catty turn goth?? Isn't she, like, sunshine incarnate?"

Fuku stares hard at Skate. "That's her sister, Skate. Catti with an I."

"What, really? Man, I thought she was still like, little! But here she is, waiting tables!"

"Kids grow up just like us, Skate," Fuku says, resting her cheek on her palm.

Skate leans back in her seat and sighs heavily. "Yeah, but like, she has a job? At our age we were delinquents. And look!" Skate gaped at Catti across the room, noting the sleek black device in her hands. "Fuku, she has a phone?! I didn't even get a phone until the last year of school!"

"Yeah, because you were always with me, and I had a phone," Fuku deadpans.

Skate waves her hand dismissively. "That's not the point. The point is, kids are turning cool and trendy. Am I... Am I out of touch with the youth of today?"

Pulling out her hand mirror, Skate takes a long, hard look at herself. Her slime, which looked so great earlier today, now feels lackluster and dull. Her flannel, once a sign of comfort and fashion, now like something her grandmother would wear. Her head, once filled with memes, now only terrible puns and thoughts of taxes.

"Oh no, Fuku, I'm turning into a bitter adult. I have to stop it, I'm too young to think about taxes!"

Fuku gives Skate a look that could only convey 'Pal, are you serious?', but Skate is too far in her head, plotting to desperately feel young again. Skate pulls her cap out of her bag, and when Catti heads over with their order balanced precariously on a serving tray, Skate puts it on. Backwards. The ultimate in cool and trendy things that the youth do.

At first, Catti doesn't notice as she's putting plates down. However, when she straightens up and asks them if there's anything else she can do, her words shrivel up and die on her tongue as she finally sees... Skate.

Skate sees the opportunity and grabs it. "Hello, fellow young person! You can see that I, too, am young and cool. Now, listen, what are the cool kids, like us of course, getting into around town? Give us the 4-1-1 my pal, my dude."

"Dial it back a bit, *pal*," Fuku groans, shying away.

Catti looks at the two of them with a disgusted look, but perhaps remembering where they are and her role, she exhales and takes a seat across from them. "No one 'cool' is doing anything. Besides regular stuff. But Kris—they're this weird kid in our class. Toriel's kid. Quiet."

Skate nods without understanding any of it. Of course. Kris. Whomst?

Catti continues, "I saw them the other day. At the lake. They were... talking to something? I couldn't see too much but. I swear I saw it. Tentacles. And I think I know whose." She pulls out a small black book and lays it on the table. Skate notes with amusement a wicked cat sticker with black makeup and strange symbols etched into the cover with a pencil or pen. Very goth. Very cool. Catti opens the notebook halfway and turns it so they all can see it. "I've been doing a bit of research. I think what Kris was talking to is actually... Cathulhu itself. You know, the beast of the underground. I've been researching the creature since I was a child. Trying to track it down. It's elusive. Haunts my waking dreams. It's like I can feel tentacles crawling in my fur. These wounds, they will not he—"





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...Are they even going to be effective against a giant cat tentacle monster? Guess she'll find out.

"On my mark," Fuku says, "Get set... Go!"

They all scream as they run to the lake's edge. Skate does a bunch of cool karate moves, kicks and punches and even a few elbow throws, daring the monster to come out and fight. Through the adrenaline she hears Catti chanting to her right, Fuku screaming to her left, and the swoosh of her bat slicing through the air. But, through all this, Skate notes the distinct lack of any sea creature.

"Hey guys, hold on a sec. Where's the monster? Where's Cathulhu?" she asks, staring at the water.

The other two stop and look as well. The noise they made was guaranteed to wake up whatever was here, but the lake sits undisturbed. Skate gives the surface a little kick, and Catti tosses in some strange plants, but nothing. No monster, regular or scary.

Skate falls down to the ground, defeated. "Man, this sucks! I was so ready!" She hears footsteps and opens her eyes to see Catti sitting beside her, looking just as bummed.

"Sorry. This was a bit of a waste." Catti looks away, but Skate catches the faintest hint of a smile. "Thanks though. For the adventure."

The sincerity hits Skate like a birthday bullet card, and she can't help but grin. "Are you kidding me? This was the most fun I've had in a long while! Definitely come to us next time you want to do something like this."

Suddenly, Skate hears a small splash from the direction of the lake. Probably Fuku in the water... wait. "Fuku girl, what are you doing? Don't hurt yourself, you're made of fire."

Fuku answers from a different direction entirely. "What? I'm right here."

"Well, if you're there, and I'm here, and Catti is beside me, then—"

The three look over to the lake in horror. A pale, thin appendage rises up from the water, and on the surface they can see something huge about to breach the water.

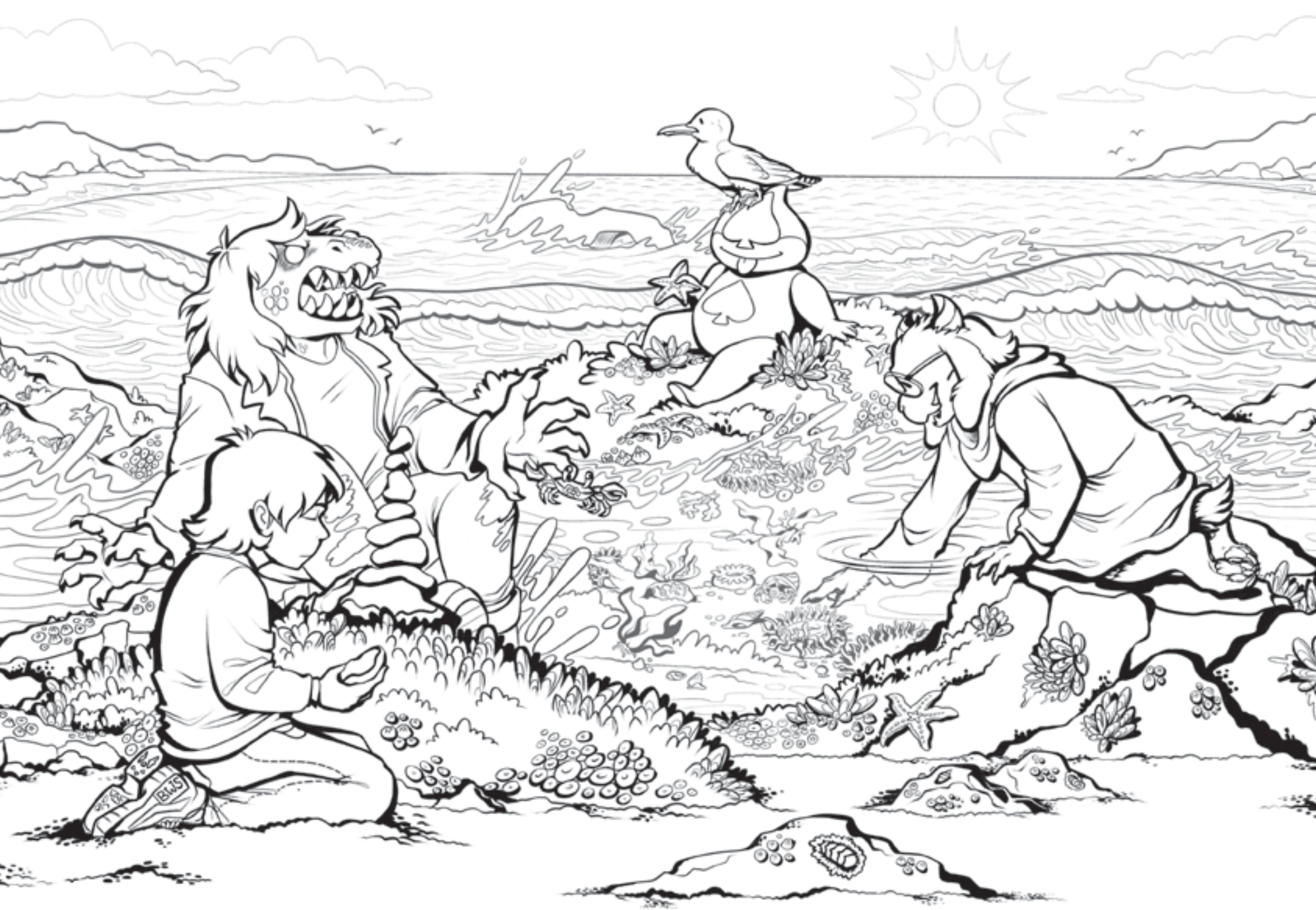
They don't stick around to find out what it is.

The sound of screams hit Onion-san as he finally rises out of the water. He only sees the backs of the monsters as they run away in panic. Oh man, he just wanted to say hi...









INSERT YOUR OWN
BERDLY PHRASE HERE!



SORINA
WICKERSON
2022





A PUZZLING DILEMMA

by Purrfecktlysinful

Content Warnings: Sad Noelle, Implied Emotional Abuse from a Parent, Hurt/Comfort

Summary: Rudy hates to see his daughter upset. Maybe a little quality time will help?

Rudy was making dinner when he heard his wife's car pull up outside. He gave the frypan he was holding a small shake, using the spatula in his other hand to move the ingredients around. *Sear, don't burn*, he thought, the rich smell of garlic and onion wafting up into his nostrils. A few moments later came the jangle of keys, then the sound of the door opening and closing.

Turning his head to glance toward the door, he called, "Welcome home!"

"Hi dad," Noelle called back.

Rudy's ear flicked. Her normally bright tone was muted and filled with disappointment. That wasn't good. He frowned slightly. Did things not go well at the spelling bee?

"Dinner's about ready! Is your mother coming?"

"No, she said she had things to do at the office. Be down in a bit," came her response, after which he heard her footsteps retreating up the stairs as she went to change.

By the time she came back downstairs, Rudy had dinner set out on the table. Linguine alfredo, a dish of mixed zucchini and tomato with garlic, and a watercress salad. He felt pretty proud of himself, and couldn't wait for Noelle to try some. She loved trying out the new dishes he would cook for them, and felt sure a good meal would brighten her day.

"Sit down and help yourself, kiddo," he offered as he sat down himself.

"It looks good," Noelle said, giving a stiff smile as she sat. Ok, so that was not the reaction he was hoping for. After they served themselves, Rudy kept an eye on his daughter as he ate.

Oh yeah, something was definitely up. Noelle was a chill kid, but she was always positive and engaged at dinner, chatting pleasantly about her day and responding with good humor to Rudy's puns and jokes. Now, however, she stared listlessly down at her plate, using her fork to push her salad around dejectedly between mouthfuls. Rudy felt a pang of guilt.

"I'm sorry I couldn't be at your spelling bee today."

Noelle looked up, surprised.

"It's okay, Dad. You had your doctor's appointment."

"I know. But I wish I could have been there. How'd it go?" he asked, trying to get her to open up.

"Oh... um... It was okay."

If anything, that question made her wilt even further. He couldn't imagine she did poorly with how she excelled at school, but maybe...

"How did you do?" he asked, probing further.

"Second place."

"Why, that's great!" he gushed, smiling broadly at her. Second place was pretty darned good in his opinion. "You must have worked so hard to do that well! I'm very proud of you!"

Noelle blushed slightly, brightening up for a moment. But just as quickly as her mood seemed to improve, it dampened again. She looked down at her plate with disappointment.

"Nah. I kinda messed up at the end. I froze on the last word. It was really dumb."

"Ah... Yeah, I can see how that would really suck," he commiserated, taking another bite of the alfredo. He chewed thoughtfully for a few moments before adding, "But second place is still pretty impressive, if you ask me."

"Thank you," she said, though Rudy could tell that she wasn't convinced. "But mom's right, I could have studied more... If I had tried harder, I could have done better."

"I'm sure she was proud of you too!" he offered, trying to cheer her up as he winced internally. His wife meant well, but her focus on only the highest of expectations could really dampen Noelle's enthusiasm. Noelle gave him a doubtful look, and Rudy went back to eating his meal, trying to think of another way to cheer her up. Nothing occurred to him, and the rest of the meal dragged on in awkward silence.

After dinner, Noelle wiped down the table as he did the few dishes left and packed away the leftovers.

"Wanna chill with me on the couch?" he asked, flashing her a mischievous grin. "We could watch a movie together. Apparently that one movie came out, the one about a kid falling into another world full of monsters? I heard it's a good one!"

Noelle shook her head regretfully.

"No. That's okay. I should probably study anyway."

"Are you sure? I would enjoy your company."

Noelle considered for a moment, and Rudy thought he could see a look of longing on her face as she glanced between him and the TV set. However, after a moment she gave a small shake of her head, her look of doubt replaced by determination.

"Yeah. I'm sure." She gave him a quick hug. "Love you, Dad. Good night."

"Good night, sweetheart," he replied, still feeling at a loss as she returned upstairs.



A few hours later, Rudy was on the couch, catching up on some gaming. He had finally managed to work his way into the last dungeon and was trying to make his way to the final boss.

Pausing the game, he looked up at the clock and frowned. Man, it was late, and no sign of his wife yet. She was really burning the midnight oil wasn't she?

A sudden shuffling sound caught his attention, and as he turned around, a bulky, undefined shape lurched down the stairs towards him. He started, and almost shouted for the intruder to identify themselves. However, before he could, the shape emerged into the light cast by the TV and he realized it was Noelle. Sleepy-eyed and wrapped in a large comforter, she gave a small start of her own when she saw Rudy.

"Oh! Hi, Dad. I was studying and got a bit hungry. Just getting a snack," she said meekly as she shuffled by, the back end of the comforter trailing behind her as she wandered into the kitchen.

A few moments later she emerged, a steaming cup of cocoa and a couple of cookies balanced on a plate in one hand, with the other holding onto the blanket wrapped around her.

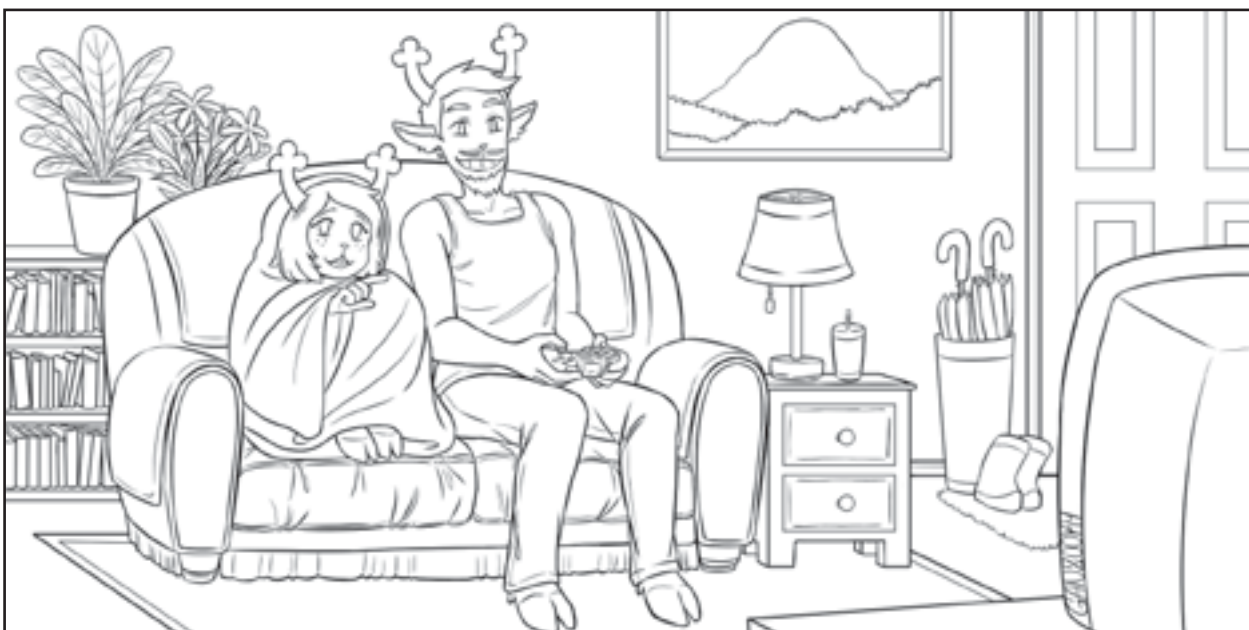
"Heya, kiddo, why don't you sit here with me for a bit while you eat. I know you've got studying to do, but it's good to take a break, you know?"

Rudy knew Noelle enjoyed watching him play games, and even played a few herself whenever her mother wasn't home. However, he didn't want to be pushy about her taking a break either. Like last time, she stood where she was for a few moments, lost in indecision as she considered her options. Rudy tried not to let the disappointment show on his face, sure that she would choose to return to her room once more. Finally, however, she sighed and smiled back at him.

"Sure, Dad," she replied as she made her way over to the couch, setting her snack on a side table. Looking at the TV, her face lit up. "Oh! Isn't this Dragon Blazers II?"

"Hehe, yup! I'm in the final dungeon too!" He unpaused the game and grimaced. "The only thing is this puzzle is a really tricky one and I just can't get my brain around it."

"Hmmm..." Noelle hummed as she watched for a few moments. Rudy moved his character around, viewing the puzzle's various parts from different angles.



His brow creased in concentration. Maybe if he pushed that block... and then flipped this switch?

The game made a rude buzz, indicating just how wrong he was.

"Ugh. This is impossible!"

"Actually, dad..." Noelle spoke up, pointing, "I think if you move that block, then that one..."

Rudy followed her instructions, curious to see what would happen next. "Like this?"

"Uh huh... then flip the left switch first, then the right..."

The game chimed, and the door to the next room opened.

"That's my smart little cookie! Great job, thanks!"

Noelle blushed. "It's no big deal. I want to see you get to the boss! I hear they're really cool in this game."

"Well, we have a ways to go, but let's see how far we can get!"

They continued the game, laughing and chatting as Rudy took care of the monsters and jumping challenges, while Noelle pointed out any secrets she happened to spot, and helped out with the trickier puzzles.

Finally, Rudy was at the last save before the boss.

"This is it, kiddo! We're here!" he said, turning to his daughter.

But he was only greeted with a soft snore. Sometime while he was knocking out the last batch of enemies, Noelle had drifted off. She was now leaning her slight weight against Rudy, her breathing slow and deep as she slept. The blanket had shifted as she dozed off, exposing the left side of her face, one horn, and one adorable little ear sticking out.

Rudy snorted softly. His kid was just too cute.

"Welp. Guess that's it for tonight. We'll tackle that boss tomorrow," he whispered, saving his game. After all, his daughter wanted to see the final boss and he wasn't going to deny her that. If he couldn't fix everything, he could at least be there for her, finding ways to make her happy while she worked through her problems herself.

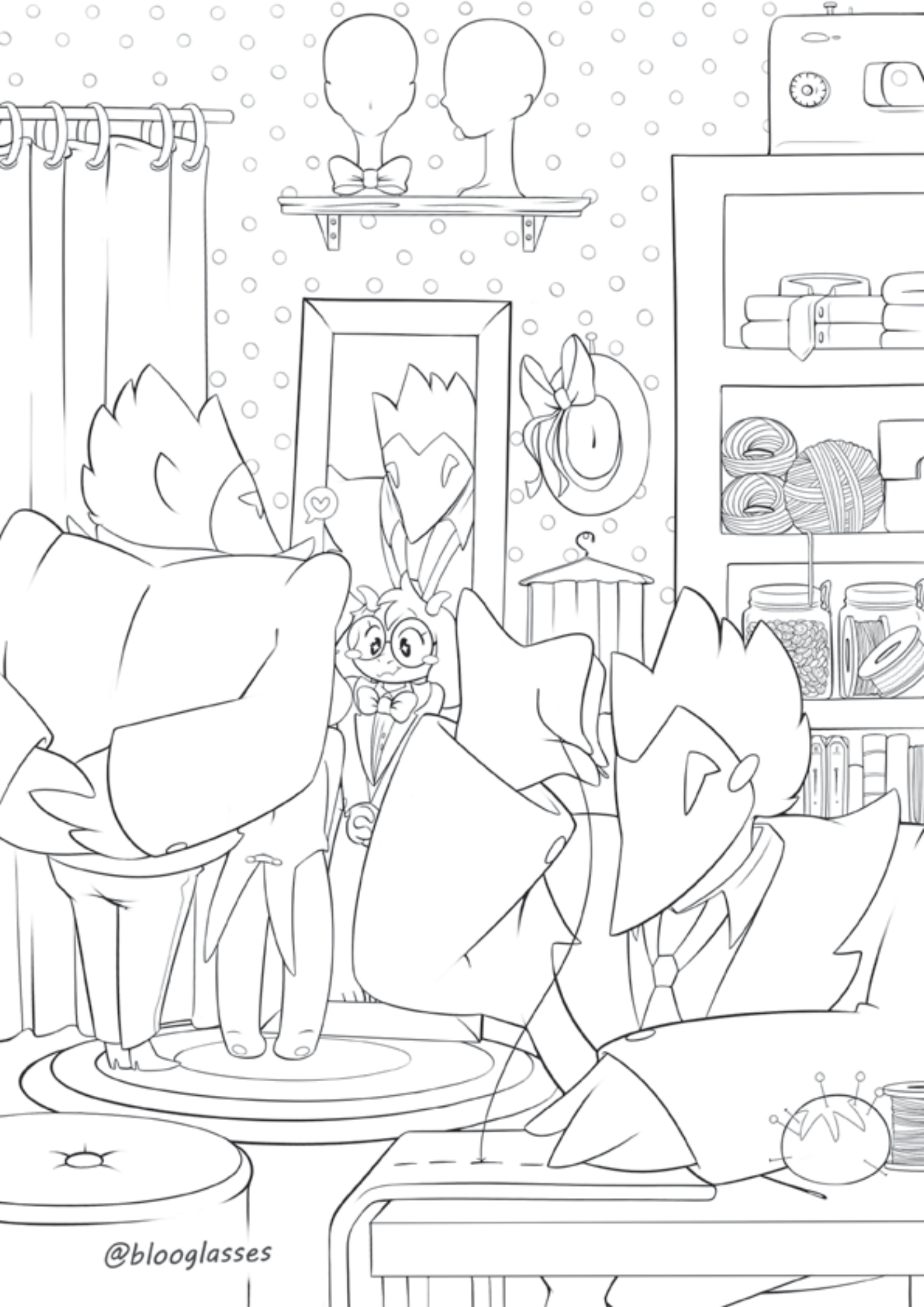
Picking her up and giving her a soft kiss on her forehead, he carefully carried her up the stairs to bed.





ORCA
WHVLE





@blooglasses





KRIS DREEMURR'S PEANUT GALLERY

by VoidRain

Content Warnings: Implied/Reference Panic Attack

Summary: Susie understands Kris perfectly. Nobody else can figure out why. Maybe that's okay.

Technically, Berdly is the first person to notice it—and he shares it by way of a folded note placed keenly on Noelle's desk. As per Berdly's brand, it's an origami figure. Of himself. Noelle isn't quite sure how he managed the glasses, but she takes it and unfolds the paper.

Is Susie aware that she has been chattering to Kris for over a minute and they haven't said a word? Is she that ignorant of their lack of communicational skills?

Noelle tries not to grin at the obvious spelling error in Berdly's note, but... he does make a good point. Her eyes drift over to the desks in front of her as she passes back her own note of a shrugging, cartoon version of herself. (She pointedly scribbles over the origami nipples Berdly has given himself.)

It isn't that Noelle *hasn't* paid attention to Susie before. Her gaze may as well take up a seat with how often it wanders over there. Right now, Susie is whispering excitedly to Kris, and poor Alphys is trying desperately to teach the class.

(It's a futile attempt. Noelle presses an *F* in the "Dr. Alphys tries" group chat, to send later.)

Kris, on the other hand, blinks passively at the board. Sometimes Noelle can catch a hint of red behind their messy bangs. They've always been a bit of an enigma, even since childhood, but something has shifted with them lately. If Noelle *had* to guess, they're acting more cagey, but... well, they're hard to read.

And then there's the matter of Susie. How, suddenly, fetching chalk from a cupboard becomes the basis of a friendship. Noelle leans on her hand, frowning. Something Susie says makes Kris turn their head.

A pointer taps the chalkboard. Scribbled in white chalk, a question reads: *What is the difference between hard and soft x-rays?* "...C-Can anyone answer this for me?"



Silence sweeps across the classroom. Some of the more decent students have the nerve to look sheepish, and Noelle digs her feet into the ground. It's *hard* to pay attention when Susie barks out a laugh and chews on chalk!

And talking of Susie—she suddenly grins, a twinkle in her eye. "I volunteer Kris. They're just *dying* to be a huge *nerd* and answer."

Murmured whispers brush aside the silence. Talks of *bully* and *pushover*, as Kris puts their head down, and hands on their desk. Berdly seems like he agrees with the whispers until Noelle turns her nose up, and then he's disagreeing with outrageous abandon and exaggerated head shakes.

Alphys herself even sighs, a little exhausted. "Susie, w-we've talked about this. Y-You can't just push other people to do the work for you, and K-Kris doesn't have to answer—"

Kris raises their hand in the air, and then beckons Susie to take the slip of paper. With a grin (and a piece of chalk idly hanging behind her sharp teeth, she just kicks her feet up. "Kris says hard x-rays are better with actually *seeing* inside the object. Typically used to see inside hauled stuff down at the police station. Soft x-rays are just absorbed by air."

Kris then raises their hand toward Susie and curls their fingers into a fist. Susie meets it with her own in kind, and their fists bump. "It was obvious Kris wanted to answer, Miss," Susie says, as if it *is* obvious. "They're the only one here who's been paying attention."

Perhaps the awkward silence (only desecrated by Berdly's strangled squawks of confusion) is fitting for the paused second until class dismissal. Noelle isn't sure she'll ever understand *either* of them.



Ralsei would probably say he has no right to place amongst the running of who noticed next, but he does notice perhaps at the most obvious time. It's after the fight with Spamton NEO, distant tremors of the rollercoaster employed to fight him echoing in the caverns.

Now, Kris is his friend, but Ralsei wouldn't go so far as to call himself an *expert* on Kris. Ralsei understands that Kris is a sharp-eyed individual, calm and collected, and keeps their emotions caged inside (save a few rare displays). They're a good leader, and Ralsei trusts their words. But it isn't until *this* moment that Ralsei is sure he's never... remembered their voice sounding like this in battle, when Ralsei asks if Kris is okay and—

"Kris? You're shouting..." Ralsei wraps his arms around Kris' rigid frame, closing his eyes. "Try not to think about it too much. Take some nice deep breaths... think about something nice, and something soft."

Kris doesn't *exactly* calm down after this, but they part from the hug and stop hanging their head at least. Susie seems to be in mutual agreement with Ralsei, that *whatever* Spamton NEO was probably doesn't matter. Things like that don't matter in the grand scheme of things.

Susie crouches and puts a hand on Kris' shoulder. "Just *tell* us next time you do something crazy like this."

Kris, their face ever placid, looks up at Susie. They blink a few times, and Ralsei flits his gaze between the two, trying to parse what's going on when—

"What?!" Susie exclaims, as Kris just continues to *blink* at her. "No, I'm *NOT* giving you a hug! That is what *Ralsei*," and suddenly she shoves an accusatory finger pointing his way, "is for! He's the portable teddy bear! He's the one everyone wants hugs from!"

"But!" Ralsei smiles, raising a finger. "If you don't give them often Susie, isn't the basic law of supply and demand determining your hugs to a high value?"

"Well, *I* demand that—you—" Susie stalks forward and *huffs*. "Ugh, *enough* of you guys!"

And just like that, she stomps off, Ralsei thinks to himself, and then looks at Kris, who is still blinking after Susie. "I think everything is going to be okay, Kris." He says, patting his friend's arm and following on, like always.

It's only later when Ralsei sees Susie waiting outside the entrance, clapping a large hand on Kris' shoulder, and muttering a soft, "*That got you to smile*," does he realise he missed something rather crucial: he really *doesn't* understand who Kris is, but Susie does.



Perhaps the last of all to notice is Toriel.

She finally notices, one day, when Kris has their friends around the house after school. Toriel knows them all as students of hers, of course, and she approves wholeheartedly of Noelle and Berdly (as strange as the latter is, he *is* a good student), but it's the newest addition that has her scratching her head.

All children deserve fair judgment, of course. And Susie isn't an especially *volatile* child, just a little misguided. If anything, Susie seems to have a modicum of respect for Toriel, being one of the few she'll acquiesce to when she catches her misbehaving in the hallways or talking back during class. But the friendship between her and Kris...

"Nah," she hears Susie bark, looking up from her mixing bowl at the sight of the teenagers clustered around the coffee table. "Kris is bluffing. It's obvious. They've got a good hand."

"How—HOW is it OBVIOUS? They have THE SAME FACE."

"I think you need better glasses, dude. Kris is, like, the easiest person to read." There's mild shuffling, and she can hear Kris hum in (what she has come to recognise over the years) approval.

Hm, interesting. Toriel takes a moment, before putting her bowl down. "Noelle? Would you mind helping me with this pie? Then I can serve it to the others."

Noelle is a good child. Despite everything that's happened to her family, the way her confidence has been rocked, Toriel trusts that she looks out for Kris ever since Asriel left for college. She comes in with her sleeves already rolled up, and they're braiding the dough pieces for the top of the pie in content silence for a few moments.

Toriel starts with a soft, "You are familiar with Susie, yes?" When Noelle's cheeks light up red, Toriel knows she's got a good eye. She prods a little further. "You do not have to answer me, Noelle, but I am unsure what to make of her. She doesn't seem like the type of person Kris usually befriends. Would you say she's a good influence on them?"

Noelle seems a little struck at the question. She *ums* and *ahs* for a few moments, trying to procrastinate on giving Toriel a true answer, and maybe it was pushing it to ask her, but—

"Um, hey, Toriel! Miss! Uh, teach?" Toriel pokes her head out, tilting her head. Susie is pointing at Kris, who remains placid, as usual. "I think Kris wants the butterscotch pie, if there's any left."

It takes Toriel a moment to respond. "It isn't too late to change the recipe, yes. I can do that. Any other requests?"

"I'm good, but—" Susie takes another long look at Kris' unmoving expression. "Brown sugar? Seriously, dude? You're so picky. Sugar's sugar." At Kris' silence, she just rolls her eyes. "Yeah, brown sugar's the winner."

"I... yes." Toriel nods, a little taken aback. "I can do that, my child. Thank you for letting me know."

Toriel goes back around the corner, and gently sprinkles brown sugar into the mixture, folding it in with her spatula. Kris never liked this before, did they? Or perhaps they always did? They tended just to follow along what Asriel wanted to eat, but maybe—

"I don't think you have to worry about Susie around Kris, Ms. Toriel."

Noelle's words draw Toriel's attention. "Oh?"

Back in the living room, as Toriel looks back around the corner, Berdly squawks as he throws the cards down. Susie slaps Kris on the back in triumph, and—oh. Toriel sees them *smiling*. It's a tiny smile, so small it's practically an ember to a wildfire, but it's *there*.

"I think, to be honest with you," Noelle says, and Toriel's heart squeezes at the sight of her dear child smiling. "Out of everyone, Susie knows them best."



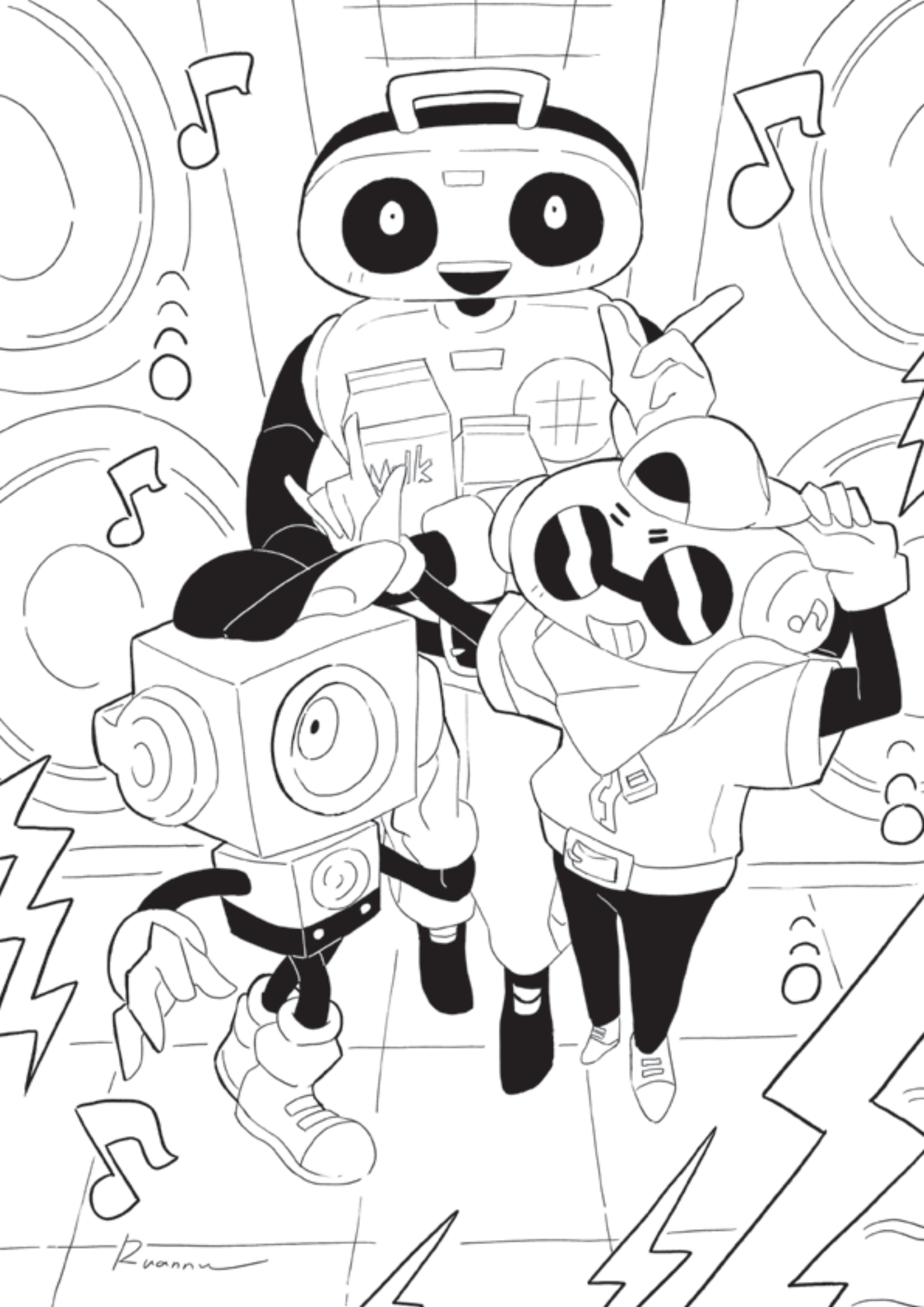




+Potassium!



@_Neizo_



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🐦 outfoxedfire
✂ VoidRain

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